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for March 30th with

THE WILD CAT

by

Brian and Celia Behan

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FISHERMEN

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— SPANISH FISHERMAN (SEE INSIDE)

& WORKERS CONTROL

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The Hull fishermen and workers' control

PETER HOWDEN

IT TOOK THE DISASTER at Aberfan in 1966 to bring home to people, in the most terrible way conceivable, that a publicly-owned industry could be run with the same indifference to human welfare as the system of capitalist exploitation whose habits and traditions it inherited. And it has taken the loss of the Hull fishing trawlers early this year to remind us that the conditions and the ideology of 19th century "private enterprise" survive unmodified in another basic industry. As Tony Topham puts it, "Owners argue that the loss of trawlers is inevitable in winter fishing in northern waters; it is no one's fault. This is a tragic example of the effects of market laws upon men's minds; responsibility is dissipated, and acts of commerce become somehow Acts of God. Can we doubt that in a society freed of this fetish it would be regarded as scandalous to operate small ships, under the hurricane conditions off Iceland in winter, not as an emergency operation to feed starving people, but as a normal commercial activity?"

And just as it transpired, after the Aberfan disaster, that the Coal Board had had plenty of warning, ignored through inertia, indifference and parsimony, of the ever-present danger, so the risks of catastrophe in the trawling industry were as clear to the trawler-owners as they were to every outsider who studied the industry, and above all, to the trawler crews. "The fear of death pervades the occupation of trawling, contributing to it a flavour of gloom and fatalism" wrote Jeremy Tunstall in his book *The Fishermen*, published in 1962, where he remarked that "the lull during the last few years in the mortality rate may only be a pause before a big tragedy". This lull followed the loss in January, 1955, off Iceland of the *Lorella* and the *Roderigo*, when forty men died as a result of the over-turning of the vessels due to icing-up of the superstructure, which appears to be the reason for the loss of at least one of the three trawlers sunk in January and February, 1968. Tunstall showed statistically that fishing was the occupation with the highest industrial death-rate in Britain.

In 1965 Professor R. S. F. Schilling of the London School of Hygiene again analysed industrial death-rates and concluded that the figure for the fishing industry was twice that for coal-mining and many times that in manufacturing industry. In the following year, in his

presidential address to the occupational medicine section of the Royal Society of Medicine, Professor Schilling observed that between 1960 and 1966, 223 fishermen were killed on British fishing vessels—about one per cent of the work force.

These figures are for the fishing industry as a whole, employing something under 20,000 full-time fishermen. For the distant-water trawling section of the industry, employing about 4,000 men operating from Hull, Grimsby and Fleetwood, the proportion of losses is even greater. Nor are the majority of deaths due to the loss of ships. According to the Board of Trade, of the 166 fishing deaths registered for the years 1962-66, 56 men were lost with their ships. Of the remainder 13 were killed on deck, 45 fell overboard, 18 were washed overboard, 21 were missing presumed drowned, and 13 died from other unspecified causes.

Chronic fatigue and lack of sleep increase the dangers of accidents, from pitching icy decks, from gutting knives, unguarded machinery and inadequate rails. Professor Schilling declared that "In a trawler crew which has fished continuously for five days and nights, I noticed signs of fatigue—an ashen grey pallor of the face, slower movements, irritability. . . . It reminded me of what I saw among soldiers during the retreat from Dunkirk. . . ."

Rear-Admiral Ievers, of the Trawler Insurance Company, has recently made a number of press and television statements about the inevitability of the deaths of 59 fishermen. He is further reported in the *Hull Daily Mail* (February 7th) as saying: "We are not surprised when a vessel is lost in a typhoon in the China Seas—but we express surprise when a trawler is lost in the circumstances which existed when the *Ross Cleveland* sank. I fail to see what more could have been done by the skipper or by anyone else *at the time*" (my italics).

This attitude ignores the fundamental fact about trawling in winter in the northern seas: that such conditions are *not* unusual, and that therefore it is wholly irresponsible to defend the continued operation of ships in such conditions, not as some dire emergency need, but as a normal commercial activity.

Of course nothing else could have been done "at the time". I know of no one who has suggested it. Rear-Admiral Ievers's comparison with the China typhoon is designed to give the impression that the recent conditions off Iceland were extraordinarily rare. But the fact is that all fishermen dread black ice as a normal expected hazard. Later in his statement Rear-Admiral Ievers is reported to have said that the problem of icing-up had been investigated, but that no method had been found "of practical value", and that the devices which were tried out involved "a prohibitive cost".

So it comes to this: trawlers have been lost in the past, and men killed, by black ice; black ice forms regularly in the northern waters in winter, not just in the very severe weather of this year. The owners made some attempt to discover a solution, but failed, or were deterred by the cost. They have continued nevertheless, to accept fishing in those waters. Yet when at least one of the three recent tragedies was probably caused by icing up, we are told (a) not to be surprised; and (b) that nothing could have been done: that no human responsibility is involved. It is incredible.

Perhaps the only form of education which would cut through the fetish of inevitability would be for the next trawler to sail from Hull to be skippered by the Rear-Admiral, and crewed entirely by trawler owners.
Hull.

TONY TOPHAM.

In 1966 the pamphlet *It's Men's Lives*, written by three students of Hull University and published by *Humberside Voice*, reinforced these findings and drew attention to the archaic structure and monopolistic tendencies in the industry.

On Christmas Day, 1966, the *St. Finbarr* caught fire in the Arctic. Ten men were burnt to death and two were drowned in the rescue. "She was one of the modern stern trawlers of 1,100 tons gross, with elaborate freezing plant and sophisticated electronic equipment. But in her crew of 25 there was no qualified electrician." The Board of Trade Inquiry's findings, recently made public, says that "On the evidence offered, the cause of the fire, the inability to control it, or the resultant loss of life, were not due to the wrongful act or default of any persons." The "Insight" column of the *Sunday Times* reported that:

"The verdict is greeted with scepticism by the trawler owners and their insurers, and with frank derision by the trawlermen. Both sides have seized on the phrase 'on the evidence offered'. 'An archaic and long-winded business', say the insurers, in private. 'A bloody farce', says the union."

And, after discussing the probable causes of the fire (mangled and dangerous wiring), the *Sunday Times* continues:

"In human terms, the Board of Trade findings in the *Finbarr* case mean that the widows and dependents have no claim to compensation unless they can afford to test the matter at law. The union helped, even though some of the men concerned were out of union benefit because their dues, deducted at source by the owners, had not been handed over to the Transport and General Workers' Union. "Insight" has established that in January, 1967, Hamlings (the owners) remitted the dues of one survivor nine months late. Hamlings' compensation was perhaps not over-generous. One of the *Finbarr* widows, Mrs. J. Hamilton, got three weeks' pay, a letter of condolence, and a free car to the memorial service."

Last year, as a result of publicity given to the statistical findings on death rates in the industry and following union pressure, the Board of Trade set up an inquiry, the "Working Group for the Safety of Deep Sea Fishermen", which divided into three separate committees which have not yet reported.

A further study of the industry was prepared by Jeremy Tunstall for the Fabian Society, *Fish: An Antiquated Industry*, and before it could be published, it was overtaken by the loss of the three trawlers at the beginning of this year. It has just been published, and a Conservative newspaper, commenting on it editorially remarks that "his conclusions are given more authority by the fact that he wrote before the event, as it were" (*Daily Telegraph*, 4th March, 1968).

DISASTER AND ITS AFTERMATH

JANUARY 10th: Trawler *St. Romanus* (600 tons, built 1948 for a Belgian coastal operator), owned by Thomas Hamling and Co., leaves Hull for Norwegian fishing grounds. Trawler *Kingston Peridot* (658

tons, built 1950), owned by Hellyer Bros., leaves Hull for Icelandic fishing grounds.

JANUARY 13th: Life-raft from *St. Romanus* found off Norway.

JANUARY 20th: Trawler *Ross Cleveland* (659 tons, built in 1949), owned by Hudson Trawlers Ltd., leaves Hull for Icelandic fishing grounds.

JANUARY 24th: Air-sea search for *St. Romanus* begins.

JANUARY 29th: Radio Operators' Union states that radio operators refused to sail in the *St. Romanus* and in the other former Belgian trawlers operated by her owners because of poor conditions. "As soon as one of these ships is mentioned the operators refuse to take it. We have taken it up with the owners on three occasions at least but just come up against a brick wall." Mr. J. Robinson, general manager of Hamblings, says he had never heard of any complaints about conditions. Jack Ashwell, TGWU fishing officer, says the union will want to know: (1) Why, under present legislation, trawlers are allowed to sail without a radio officer. (2) Why the picking up a Mayday signal and the life-raft can remain unreported for many days. (3) Why the silence of a trawler fails to spark off an immediate alert. (4) Why, if the silence continues, a full-scale search is not mounted.

JANUARY 30th: Dinghy from *Kingston Peridot* and a massive quantity of oil washed up at village of Kopasker on northern coast of Iceland.

JANUARY 31st: TGWU asks Prime Minister to receive deputation of fishermen's wives and union representatives. Union statement says that it will not tolerate "the farce of enquiries like that conducted after the loss of the *St. Finbarr*". It says that the news of the missing trawlers reflects the serious and tragic problems which should have been resolved years ago.

FEBRUARY 1st: Hull trawlermen's wives launch protest petition. Mrs. Lillian Bilocca says, "If ever I hear about a trawler going to sea without a full complement of crew or without a radio operator, I shall go aboard and wild horses will not drag me off until the ship is properly manned". Mrs. Christine Smallbone, trawlerman's wife says, "There seems to be a couldn't-care-less attitude among trawler owners about safety conditions. We intend to shake them up. Our campaign has become the rallying point for discontent over safety and working conditions which has been boiling up among trawler folk for 18 months." The petition demands: (1) A complete review and modernisation of safety conditions for trawlermen. (2) A ban on signing on inexperienced men without service books, to bring the crew on vessels up to the full complement. (3) Overhaul of every trawler before it leaves port for fishing grounds. (4) Higher wages for fishermen and company help in buying gear. (5) Wireless operators on every vessel. (6) Trawlers to sail with spare parts so that repairs can be made at sea.

FEBRUARY 2nd: *St. Romanus* and her crew officially declared lost. Crew refuses to take out the *Kingston Zircon*, because they allege that: Sixteen old-pattern life-jackets were provided for 20 men; fuses in the fo'c'sle were uncovered and a fire risk; doors and escape hatches

were sticking and could be dangerous in an emergency; fire extinguisher was empty. Member of crew declares that "We are only now realising our own folly. The fate of these two ships has caused us to get really safety conscious." The skipper says, "The men simply want an excuse for not sailing. Conditions are good. A small and an older ship such as this one cannot hope to reach the conditions of a new one. The men knew that in the first place. Why did they sign on knowing that?" The owners say later, "Different life-jackets have been put aboard and all the other matters raised by the crew have been adjusted".

FEBRUARY 3rd: Crew of the *St. Andronicus* refuse to sail, claiming that the life-jackets were "archaic". Crew of the *Kingston Zircon* again refuse to sail claiming that there was no forward escape hatch and no life-raft on the fo'c'sle. After negotiations three men walk off. Three Hull wives, one of them the widow of a member of the *St. Romanus* crew, struggle with police at Hull Fish Dock as they try to leap aboard the trawler *St. Keverne* in a bid to stop her sailing as she carried no radio operator. The vessel sailed and after she left the dock a radio operator was taken to her in the Humber.

FEBRUARY 5th: Hull trawler *Ross Cleveland* lost at Isafjordhur on the north-west coast of Iceland. Grimsby trawler *Notts County* aground at Snaefjallastrond, Iceland. Trawlermen's wives, with 10,000 signatures to their petition, meet the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Board of Trade fishing minister and present their proposals: (1) A full-scale inquiry into the operations of the trawler fishing industry. (2) A close season for fishing in dangerous waters. (3) Compulsory 12-hour reporting by trawlers with every vessel carrying a qualified radio operator. (4) At least one mother ship for each fishing fleet equipped for long-range communications and medical help. (5) Safety checks on trawlers' equipment before they sail.

FEBRUARY 6th: Hull trawler *Prince Charles* returns to port after dispute over muster alarm in crew's quarters. "Although this equipment is not required by regulation it was decided to recall the trawler and fit one," say owners.

FEBRUARY 8th: Meeting at Board of Trade between Minister, trawler owners, skippers and union representatives. Trawlers to be withdrawn from area north of Iceland until the arrival of a protection vessel. All vessels proceeding to Iceland to use the westabout passage. Trawlers to report to control ship every twelve hours. All vessels over 140 ft. long to carry wireless operators.

FEBRUARY 9th: Members of crew of Hull trawler *Lancella* refuse to sail. Board of Trade spokesman points out that the measures agreed on the previous day were a "compromise between the strong views expressed by different interests".

FEBRUARY 14th: Four inquiries to be held into the Hull trawler disasters. Three of them will attempt to find out why the *St. Romanus*, *Kingston Peridot* and *Ross Cleveland* were lost. The fourth will look at various aspects of the tragedy, such as safety measures, pay, hours of work and whether shop stewards should sail in trawlers. No date fixed for any of them.

Mr. Carl Ross, chairman of the £30,000,000 Ross Group, leaves the country for a holiday in South Africa.

FEBRUARY 15th: Deadlock at meeting of National Joint Council for the Fishing Industry. Deckhands awarded another 12s. 3d. a week.

WHY DO THEY GO TO SEA?

Among those who died in the lost Hull trawlers, seven were boys under the age of 18. Four were deckie-learners, and three were galley boys or assistant cooks. About 300-350 boys are employed in the Hull trawler fleet. Most are deck-hand learners, who usually begin at 16, the rest are galley-boys who can go to sea at the age of fifteen. Why do they choose this occupation?

People talk of family tradition and say, "It's in the blood" and so on. Is this true? Jeremy Tunstall, in *The Fishermen*, demolishes this idea in a few telling paragraphs and a brief statistical enquiry:

"Fishing is often said to be marked by a strong family tradition. One reason why this is widely believed is that the men themselves often claim that most fishermen come from 'fishing families'. But they also say in the same breath that they don't want their sons to go into fishing. The only men who ever want their sons to follow them are skippers, usually successful skippers. . . . One fisherman told me of his son's intention to go on trawlers when he left school in a few months' time. There were tears in his eyes as he spoke. This man felt he had one good word of advice to give his son—not to go to sea. But the son was unwilling to profit from the one piece of useful experience which his father had gained from the occupation of trawling. The bleakness of a trawlerman's life comes sharply home to him in this situation. He is all the more tragic because his tragedy is unspeakable, unutterable. . . .

"The word 'tradition' means a custom or belief which is handed down. The only things to do with fishing which are handed down are a number of obscene expressions to the effect that it is a horrible job.

"There is something else, however, that fishermen and their sons have in common, and this is poverty—poverty in the sense of the rate of remuneration and total advantages of the job in relation to other jobs available. The fact that fishermen have high *annual earnings* does not alter the point that they are at the bottom of the social system—in shore terms they are unskilled labourers. We all know that *poverty reproduces itself*."

Tunstall emphasised this point again recently in his Fabian pamphlet. Inshore fishing has a genuine family tradition, he declares, "But in trawler fishing there is no such family tradition. When sailing-trawler fishing was booming in Hull and Grimsby in the 1880s due to the arrival of the railway, the life was so hard that the recruits were mainly boys apprenticed direct from workhouses in Leeds and London. Two lurid murder cases, in which Hull fishing apprentices were brutally beaten and murdered at sea, resulted in a Board of Trade inquiry in 1882. This inquiry took the lid off an apprenticeship system which contained strong elements of forced labour. Teenage boys when ashore lived with girl prostitutes; often they tried not to go back to sea

and were sent to prison. From prison they were put right back on the sailing smacks. The boys were terrified of the staggeringly high death rate." In the years 1880-82 the number of fishing apprentices serving sentences in Hull gaol was just under half the total number of apprentices. These are the traditions of the Hull trawler industry.

Tunstall conducted a survey among the Hull trawlermen and found that two-thirds of all fishermen had started at seventeen or younger. "Overwhelmingly, this majority group of trawler recruits came into fishing from 'dead-end' jobs, or straight from school. Over one-third of all the men started fishing at fifteen or under (when the school leaving age was fourteen). A quarter never did any work at all on shore, but went straight from school to fishing. . . . Some of the boys had done a variety of different unskilled jobs. The fact that many fishermen are recruited from a group of boys who shift rapidly from job to job after leaving school is reflected in what happens to some recruits after they have started fishing. Many boys go into fishing for one, two, or three trips. Only about a third of all boys who try fishing stick at it for as long as a year. . . . If a boy goes straight into fishing when leaving school at fifteen he can do only one job—galley-boy. Some lads, realizing this, wait until they are sixteen and old enough to qualify for the deckhand-learner's ticket (after putting in 100 days at sea and attending a four-week course at the Nautical College)." (Now usually six weeks.)

A deckie-learner gets half the basic pay and poundage of a deck-hand in addition to "backhanders" from the men, and this pay is higher than most lads of sixteen or seventeen would earn, and very much more than an apprentice's pay. We need look, Tunstall remarks, "no further for the true romance of trawling".

There are of course, other factors. "Fishing seems to attract to it a particular kind of boy who likes the aura of toughness and virility which surrounds it. In some cases boys are trying to escape home environments which they dislike, and one reason for such dislike may be that they feel they are not regarded as sufficiently manly at home. Some boys of sixteen don't mind coming home at 5 p.m. to tea cooked by their mothers and then wandering off down the street to see their old pals. But other boys seem to feel insecure and threatened by this kind of half-child, half-adult life. There is little doubt that certain boys, despite receiving a severe physical and mental battering at sea, yet find life on a trawler psychologically easier and more relaxing. . . .

"On a trawler distinctions are made on the basis of jobs and pay. But there are none of the wider class distinctions of accent, vocabulary, social distance, culture and so on. To some extent the young fisherman can contract out of his inferior position in the class system while at sea. And while ashore he can be king for a day, wearing new suits, riding in taxis, drinking whisky.

"In an industrial society a young working-class man finds himself in an inferior position. Only to women can he feel superior (and this shapes his relations with them and may make his attitude to women different from that of middle-class men). He lacks education, wealth,

position—all he has is his manhood. It is not surprising then that some youths who find themselves faced with the prospect of a life-time of unskilled labour seek to emphasise their masculinity. The fishing industry appeals to boys who have a particularly strong urge in this direction."

It has been noticed, however, that if in one particular year there are an unusually large number of jobs available for school-leavers in Hull and Grimsby, the trawler owners find it correspondingly more difficult to recruit boys. Every year they send recruitment officers to the schools round Hull and Grimsby in an attempt to attract young school-leavers into trawling, taking with them films about life at sea. "Can it be," asks the journal *The Teacher*, "that such films exploit the suspect, meretricious claim 'it's a man's life on a trawler'?" Lionel Cox, as secretary of the Hull Fishing Vessel Owners' Association says, "We get a lot of boys who are attracted by an advertisement in a careers book, but there is a tendency for them to leave after a couple of trips."

In February, the *Hull Daily Mail* published interviews with relatives of the lost trawlermen. Of 15-year-old Michael Barnes, galley-boy on the *Ross Cleveland*, who was making his first trip, it reported that "His mind was set on it. We tried to change it but he had to go. I think the more we tried to persuade him not to go, the more determined he became. . . . He had packed up his job at a Hull tannery, refused to get another, and went to sea." Of 18-year-old Barry Rogers, deckhand on the *Ross Cleveland*: "When he left school he took a shore job but found that the money was not good enough and he decided to go to sea." Of 15-year-old Eugene Carney, galley-boy on the *Kingston Peridot*: "He did not like fishing but decided to sail with the *Peridot* as assistant cook to give the life one more try." And of Ken Swain, lost with the *Kingston Peridot*, "Hull's high unemployment forced deckie-learner Ken Swain to go to sea".

THE WIVES' CAMPAIGN

The campaign by the fishermen's wives has been the remarkable feature of the aftermath of the disasters. In an isolated community like that of the Hull fishing industry, where "women's place is in the home", people like Mrs. Bilocca, who have come forward with demands and demonstrations, have to face considerable hostility and ridicule. Mrs. Bilocca has received threatening letters, was shouted down when she addressed a meeting at Grimsby, and has been publicly rebuked by influential figures like Skipper Laurie Oliver, secretary of the Hull Trawler Officers' Guild. "I have been asked," he said, "by the wives of some of my members, to state that the action of Mrs. Bilocca has not enhanced the image the public may have of fishermen's wives. Women who have lost men on the three ships have had the least to say about it, which is what we admire. The idea of forming a women's committee to fight battles for the men, is, to my mind, completely ludicrous."

The short answer to Skipper Oliver is that one of the originators of the campaign lost her brother, the skipper of the *Ross Cleveland*, a few days later, that one of the leaders of the demonstration at the

fish dock was the widow of a member of the crew of the *St. Romanus*, and that of the two women who went with Mrs. Bilocca in the delegation to London, one had lost her father at sea and the other was the wife of a Grimsby trawler officer.

The women have been perfectly explicit in their demands. As one of them, Mrs. Elliott, put it, "The women have got their grievances over to the right people. We are now appealing to the fishermen to have a 100 per cent union membership and to take over where we leave off." And Mrs. Smallbone added, "Whatever type of voice is used, it must be used on the men themselves to urge them to have 100 per cent union membership as, without it, our fight and the men's lives will have been in vain."

Tony Topham has noted how the wives' campaign has created a new mood among the men: "At the mass meetings of wives and mothers which have been held in Hull, the debate about *how* to achieve results has reproduced, in microcosm, all the historic strategies of the labour movement, from Fabianism to syndicalism. Frustration over delays and red tape, anger and grief, have brought forth determined advocates of direct action. Mrs. Bilocca, leader of much of the agitation, has proved her point that direct action can be made to pay."

"INDIVIDUALISM" AND MONOPOLY

In a brisk and "realistic" comment on the trawler disasters, *The Economist*, under the heading "Commonsense in a Tough Trade", declared that "Individualism goes right the way down to the newest young deckhand, signing on in hopes of a record catch and a heavy bonus. It is as unlikely to be shaken by a sudden succession of disasters as by the sea's toll year in, year out". The raising of standards—in particular the introduction of bigger stern-trawling vessels will mean, says *The Economist*, "a further concentration of the industry in fewer hands: not a bad thing, but it will take some getting in so individualistic a trade".

What is this individualism of the trawler industry, and does it really run all the way down from owners to the youngest deckhand?

So far as the employers in the industry are concerned, it is pretty spurious. Like so many believers in "free enterprise", they do everything in their power to reduce competition. In the 1950s, when the Hull trawler owners were spending £50 a year on prestige advertising for every fisherman they employed, one of the newspaper advertisements of the British Trawlers' Federation, in the spirit of the old saying that the Ritz Hotel is open to all, declared that, "Anyone who tells you that Britain's distant-water trawling industry is a monopoly is talking through his hat. Pure undiluted bunk! Anyone can buy a trawler and go fishing—if he's got the cash. . . ." But what was really happening? The pamphlet *It's Men's Lives* sums up the monopolistic trend in the industry thus:

"One can trace a decreasing fishing fleet in total, but an increasing monopoly situation of ownership. Large firms justify take-over bids and mergers on the grounds of rationalisation and economies of scale

within the industry. As the capital costs of catching fish increase the advantage lies naturally with the larger firms. Government aid in bolstering up the industry goes to large and small firms but it is the larger firms who can take most advantage of Government aid because of their already superior size and position. The result is that the smaller firms cannot compete and are either bought out or taken over by the White Fish Authority. Therefore private monopoly is being encouraged by public money. . . . There are three monopolists dominating the industry—Associated Fisheries, Ross, and Boston Deep Sea. These firms are the end product of a series of take-overs since the war. For example, Associated Fisheries in 1961 took over Hellyers and Kingston Steam Trawler Co. for £20m. These firms still trawl under their own names although controlled by Associated Fisheries. The three big firms own 44% of the fleet, the monopoly of these firms being even more powerful when it is realised that the firms have a monopoly of control in the highly remunerative distant-water areas." The Ross Group (1966 profits £3,250,000 before tax) owns "at least twelve trawling firms all trading under their own names; it also owns oil refining firms, processing and distributing companies, road transport, catering, cold storage, fish retailing, broiler companies and trawler repairers". Associated Fisheries Ltd. (1965 profits £1,569,008 before tax) owns "seven trawling companies and their subsidiaries. They also own 8 fish processing and distributing firms, 3 cold storage firms, 3 catering firms, 3 transport firms and 10 other companies dealing in a wide range of food and engineering products." Boston Deep Sea Fisheries (1964 profits £133,938) "own or have interests in at least 13 fishing companies, and in food distribution and marine engineering". Britfish, the major fish exporting company, is "controlled by the leading, and supposedly competing, firms, Associated Fisheries and Ross Group".

The pamphlet points out that "In December, 1965, Ross Group made a £15 million take-over bid for Associated Fisheries. . . . The White Fish Authority which is supposed to serve as public watchdog for the well-being of the fishing industry, were in favour of this take-over. They felt it would make the industry more efficient. Public disquiet forced Douglas Jay, President of the Board of Trade, to bring the proposed take-over before the Monopolies Commission. . . . Arguments used by Ross to justify their action was that the resulting large combine would bring savings in distribution of £790,000 annually. The Commission thought this an overstatement of some £245,000 but said that even taking Ross's figures, the benefits would only be ½d. less in price per pound of fish sold to the consumer. . . . The above decision would appear to reaffirm a situation of competition but the self-same firms have been referred to the Restrictive Practices Court for their agreements in restricting supplies and price of fish." This was in 1966. Already in 1961 the Fleck Committee's Report on the Fishing Industry describing the system of dutch auctions by which fish are sold, remarked that "We have little doubt that the auctions are in practice often far from what they seem" and stated that the large merchants often bid prices up by agreement in order to force small wholesalers to pay more

than a realistic price. (Tunstall, in his Fabian pamphlet concludes that the Ross take-over should have been allowed.)

So much for the "individualism" of the trawler firms. They are not individualists, they are monopolists, and like all such, they want public funds as well. The pamphlet *It's Men's Lives* remarks that "It is commonplace in modern capitalism for the state to be required to step in and provide public money to enable private enterprise to survive. . . . Until 1961, firms fishing in distant waters persistently ignored government exhortation to modernise; they claimed instead the virtues of free enterprise. However, increasing costs and foreign competition have changed their attitudes. Now, in bad years the industry complains, as the Ross Group did in their 1965 Annual Report, that the industry 'continues to suffer from lack of support, indecision and changes of policy at government level'. Yet, as a recent White Fish Authority report pointed out, there is great difficulty in good years of persuading the firms to consider the long-run interests of the industry as a whole." Since 1961 government grants and loans have been paid to the owners of distant-water fishing vessels, and subsidies are also paid for each day spent at sea.

The OECD Report on "Subsidies and other financial support to the fish industry", published in 1965, remarks that operational subsidies are given to new vessels because incentives from loans and grants are considered insufficient by the owners. The pamphlet comments, "Not only do they get money to build new boats because they are more efficient than old vessels but they also insist on being given a subsidy to run those new vessels!" and draws attention to the fact that the public are not allowed to know where these grants go: "In a debate in the House of Commons on 30th July, 1965, the Minister of Agriculture was asked about applications for grants from distant-water vessel owners. He said there were 42 such applications but refused to say who specifically had made these claims."

The *Hull Daily Mail* (1st February, 1968) reports that during 1966/67 the White Fish Authority made grants of £1,014,133 towards the acquisition of freeze trawlers (the new, larger stern-trawling vessels), compared with £824,695 in the previous year.

After the loss of the *St. Romanus*, Kingston Peridot and Ross Cleveland, when there was talk of a ban on winter fishing north of Ireland, Mr. Michael Burton, president of the Hull Fishing Vessel Owners' Association, said, "If the Government wants to help the fishermen and the fishing industry it should make larger grants available for the building of new stern trawlers so that we can scrap these older ships and make way for a new modern fleet. Next December the Government grant, now 40 per cent reverts to 35 per cent. Grants should be up to 60-70 per cent to make it worthwhile for the owners to build these trawlers. There should be less talk and more action from the Government. Let the men who know how to run the industry replace these older vessels with new stern trawlers which are a far better working unit, safer for the men and have better working conditions." Mr. Burton (reported in the *Hull Daily Mail* on 7th February, 1968) said

that any ban on Icelandic fishing would mean laying up the smaller and older trawlers which found it very difficult to fish the deep Norwegian waters because they were not powerful enough to tow the gear. "What is to happen to the crews if the older trawlers are laid up? Is the Government going to underwrite their losses? Are the men going to be thrown on the dole queues? If foreigners are going to be allowed to fish up there why can't we?"

Mr. Burton, and his fellow trawler owners, like so many rugged individualists, want to have their cake and eat it. They want to be given up to 60 to 70 per cent of the taxpayers' money towards the cost of new vessels, but at the same time resent any outside interference with "the men who know how to run the industry".

THE MEN AND THEIR UNION

Although the owners do their utmost to eliminate competition among themselves, the pay structure of the industry is designed to promote it among the crews of the trawlers. Employment is casual (crews are signed on for one three-week trip at a time) with the obvious lack of security that this entails. A system of bribing by paying "backhanders" to the right people is widespread. It is very easy for men to be victimised and very hard for them to prove it.

The authors of *It's Men's Lives* remark that "Every boy and man early in their lives as fishermen think they can rise to the top; it is fairly easy to take the exams to become qualified as Bosun, Second Hand or Skipper. . . . Trawler owners positively encourage men to work for their skipper's tickets by offering generous allowances, but on gaining this the fisherman finds that for every vessel there are many qualified men seeking the job and should a skipper fail to make good catches he will never be skipper again. This situation is aggravated by the fact that numbers of vessels are declining steadily, but is perpetuated because the employers see this as an excellent method of dividing the labour force—this system puts every man into competition with his fellows and prevents any solidarity, such as trade union action." Tunstall makes the same point in his Fabian pamphlet: "The skipper's job becomes a reality for about one in every 50 trawler fishermen. The other 49 are getting 'old' by the time they're 45; this means declining earnings and no jobs ashore to go back to. . . . The skippers themselves are chronically insecure. Competition for skippers' jobs is ferocious. To make sure of keeping his job, a skipper must catch a lot of fish. And to do this many skippers drive their men relentlessly. I have myself seen a skipper continue to fish off Bear Island when waves were coming aboard and knocking over the deckhands gutting fish on the open deck."

Thus the "individualism" of the men is fostered by their monopolistic employers. It is a function of the system of payment by results. That it is not in some way a characteristic of fishing as an occupation can be seen from the extent of a co-operative structure in the fishing industry of many other countries.

The fishermen belong to the biggest union in the country, the Transport and General Workers'. When Ernest Bevin was negotiating the series of union mergers which brought about the TGWU in 1922,

the National Union of British Fishermen was one of the original amalgamating unions. Tunstall describes in *The Fishermen* the difficulties of organising men in this particular trade: "Because of the highly competitive structure of their job and the very wide variation in fortunes of individual fishermen, there is little general sense of unity. Their experience of the shore comes in brief intervals, when they are normally urgently preoccupied with fulfilling their stored-up desires for leisure, drink, sex, and family life. Fishing thus shapes men who engage in it to a particular pattern, but it also attracts in the first place a group of men who have a special attitude to work. Fishing does not attract the kind of man who wants to work a 42-hour week under certain agreed conditions, to be paid at overtime rates for any additional work, and to have a shop steward always near at hand. A lad who goes fishing opts out of the more normal pattern of working-class life. He is not interested in the limited objectives which trade unions aim at on behalf of all the workers on the particular job. He is attracted by the gamble of each trip and the gamble of possibly getting up to the skipper's position. He is prepared to accept harsh conditions, very long hours, and the bullying treatment of some of his superiors."

Nevertheless the union had, he estimated, at least 75 per cent membership among the regular fishermen in Hull. In 1962, Tunstall, commenting on the relative lack of success of the union in bettering the conditions of its members, related this to the remoteness of the national organisers from the particular problems of this comparatively small group of workers in this isolated industry. He mentioned the success of the Atlantic Fisherman's Union in the New England ports of the United States and felt fairly certain that "had the Hull fishermen belonged to a small independent union (and especially if strong local leaders had kept them in such a union) the structure of the occupation today would be different". Shortly afterwards (*New Society*, 4th April, 1963) he was reporting that, "Nearly all the men in Grimsby and some in Hull have recently joined the new breakaway United Fishermen's Union; but this union also is experiencing the standard difficulties of organising casual workers, and suffers from the fact that men with leadership ability always get promoted into skipper's and mate's jobs." More recently the TGWU has "regained the trawler fishermen's loyalty". Jack Ashwell, writing in the February, 1968, issue of *Humberside Voice*, puts it thus: "The TGWU has had its peaks and its troughs; in recent times a reappraisal has been taken and a change in attitude has prevailed which is more palatable to its members."

Three-quarters of the Hull skippers and nearly half of the mates belong to the Hull Trawler Officers' Guild (which is not a union). There is also a Guild at Grimsby. At Fleetwood the Guild which once existed has joined the TGWU, and at Aberdeen the Guild co-operates with the union in imposing conditions on the owners. This is hardly the case at Hull. Tunstall considered in 1962 that "Were the trawler officers to support the men's union, with whose representatives they sit on the employees' side of the fishing industry's National Joint Industrial Council, they would almost certainly produce radical changes in the

employment, pay, hours, and conditions of all grades of fishermen. . . ."

The rebirth of union militancy was reflected in the 12-day strike of nearly 1,000 fishermen in February, 1966, the first for ten years. "The strike, over 100% union membership, may have failed to achieve its declared intentions but it does show that the men are sufficiently discontented to risk being charged with mutiny and sent to prison."

More recently the union has been pressing for an extra £1 a week on the deckhands' pay, and for shipboard representatives, or shop stewards. As explained by the union representatives, one of the main purposes of having stewards would be to allow the crew's views to be put to the skipper when at sea without fear of penalty under the Merchant Shipping Act of 1894 which makes any misbehaviour or disobedience at sea, however trivial or justified, punishable by imprisonment, including representations on behalf of the crew which could be treated as conspiracy. Under bad weather conditions the opinion most likely to be voiced is that fishing should be stopped. The idea is that if the skipper did decide to carry on fishing in spite of representation from the men, the matter could be logged and investigated by both sides when the trawler returns home. (The National Union of Seamen already has shop stewards on merchant ships.)

At the meeting of the National Joint Industrial Council in London on 15th February, the award made to deckhands was only an extra 12s. 3d. a week, raising their basic wage to £14 and guaranteed pay to £20 6s. 10½d. Deadlock was reached on the shop steward proposal, which was refused by the skippers and the owners, whose proposals that the size of the crews should be *reduced* met with angry protests at Grimsby and Hull.

After the meeting, Mr. Jack Ashwell declared that "At the Board of Trade inquiry into the industry, we want three things considering: wages, hours, and a shop steward on every vessel. This is what we are fighting for."

WORKERS' CONTROL

"Mr. Ashwell claims that the real hardship in the trawling industry is being felt by the trawlermen themselves, adding that they need nationalisation, modernisation and workers' control."

—*Hull Daily Mail*, 14th February, 1968.

"The time is long overdue for nationalisation of the whole of the fishing industry with full workers' control."

—Alf Mellors, Branch Secretary, TGWU, 13th February, 1968.

"The West Hull Labour Party has gone farther, and called for nationalisation with Workers' Control."

—Foreword to *It's Men's Lives*.

"What they need is: Nationalisation, Modernisation and Workers' Control."—*Humberside Voice*, February, 1968.

Only a few years ago this particular coupling of demands would have been very unlikely indeed, and even though it is hard to conceive our labour government nationalising the trawling industry, and even harder to conceive them nationalising it with an organisational structure

providing for workers' control, the arguments which the slogans crystallise are good ones and the eventual aim is valid.

Modernisation is obviously called for. The number of stern trawlers—the larger vessels incorporating freezing plants, which trawl from the stern with considerably more safety and protection for the crew, is small (between a third and a half of the Hull distant-water fleet is 18 years old or more). The rate of replacement is slow and the owners, who, as we have seen are near monopolists, claim that they need up to 60-70% grants to make it worth while to build them, in addition to subsidies. If the public is to provide 70%, why not 100% and run the industry as a public enterprise?—this would be the orthodox socialist argument. (Tunstall in his Fabian pamphlet takes the view that the British trawler owners made the switch to freezer trawlers too late, and that they will not, in the North Atlantic, be an economic proposition. If this is so, the sensible thing would be to switch to a different kind of fishing and leave the "distant waters" to ports nearer the fishing grounds. The general opinion is that the modern ships, apart from being safer, *are* more profitable.)

The argument for workers' control in fishing is the same as that for every industry. It was put over a century ago by John Stuart Mill: "The form of association . . . which if mankind continue to improve, must be expected in the end to predominate, is not that which can exist between a capitalist as chief, a workpeople without a voice in management, but the association of the labourers themselves on terms of equality, collectively owning the capital with which they carry on their operations, and working under managers elected and removable by themselves." In the most dangerous industry in the country, the particular argument for workers' control is put in its most direct form in the article elsewhere in this issue on the Spanish fishermen, "We own our fishing boats in common, and whenever the weather is uncertain our captains meet together on the town bridge and decide whether it's safe for the town to fish. That way no crazy greedy individual can risk the lives of his crew and anyone who follows him."

This is the basis of the current demand for shipboard representatives or shop stewards on the trawlers, and it was the basis for the Hull fishermen's argument in the strike back in the 1880s that they should have some say in the selection of the "admirals" of the fleets of fishing smacks. The arguments which are always being flung at the advocates of workers' control about its unfeasibility because of the size and complexity of the units of modern industry cannot apply to fishing. The industry is divided into self-contained units of 20 to 25 men. What do the *owners* contribute to it? Not even the whole capital cost of the boats. There is no fund of unattainable specialist knowledge that they possess. Skippers, mates, bosuns and deckhands share the same background and experience. Where there is special non-fishing expertise, that of the chief engineer, radio operator, cook, it is in the hands of specialist members of the crew. What is unfeasible about the idea of an elected skipper, or of rotation of the office among those

qualified to assume it?

Co-operatively owned fishery industries are to be found in every part of the world, from the Eskimo fishing co-operatives to the Nigerian community of Aiyetoro, where the boats are communally owned and the proceeds of the catch shared out among all members. In Iceland, where most of the population depend in one way or another on the fishing industry for their livelihood, there are co-operative freezing plants as well as co-operatively owned trawlers. The whole of the catch in Norway is marketed co-operatively, as it is in Labrador and Nova Scotia. In Japan, the foremost fishing country in the world, the co-operatives, according to Hebe Spaul, "work closely together, and if a fishing fleet is away from home waters it can land a catch at the harbour nearest to the fishing grounds, and the value of the catch will be credited to the fleet's home society. The societies not only own and control the markets but they also act as wholesalers. . . . Some of the co-operatives go in for fish-processing, and a number join together to operate joint processing factories. All these societies are joined together in the National Federation of Fishing Co-operatives. Among other services which the Federation carries out on behalf of its member societies is to operate ice-making and freezing plants. Both produce ten tons of ice daily, as well as providing cold storage between them for several hundred tons of fish. As with co-operatives of all kinds in Japan, the fishing societies consider that social welfare schemes for the members are very important and much of the profit is used for such schemes." Fishermen's co-operatives are in an under-developed state in this country, and cater only for inshore fishermen. The Fisheries Organisation Society has, over the years, assisted in the establishment of societies supplying nets, gear, paint and sea-clothes, and marketing fresh fish. In Scotland the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society has set up fishery co-operatives in Shetland and in the marketing of lobsters from the Western Isles. There is no co-operative organisation in this country owning distant-water vessels.

Those who believe in workers' control through governmental action can seek encouragement from the fact that it could be introduced without the passage of a single bit of legislation. The statutory body, the White

On March 6th, 1883, occurred one of the worst disasters ever to happen to the fishing community of Hull. Twenty-three fishing smacks and about 150 men were lost in a storm on this day. The disaster shocked the town and when the fishermen paraded with banners against "winter fleeing" on October 1st, public opinion this time was to be on their side. The strike began formally about a week later.

The strike was weakening in the early days of November, with the owners able to get away an increasing number of smacks, and on November 10th the Trades Council, acting for the Fishermen's Society, accepted terms. The two main points were: that winter fleeing was not to be carried on beyond 55N; and that each fleet was to be limited to 50 vessels. Other points were that there should be no victimisation, and the men should have a say in the appointment of the "admirals" of the fishing fleets.

—JOHN SAVILLE: "Early History of Hull's Waterfront Workers" (*Humberside Voice*).

Fish Authority, set up in 1950, can, without exceeding its powers in the slightest, make grants for the acquisition of vessels to syndicates of fishermen, or operate them in its own right, and it can encourage co-operatives and assist them financially. It is hardly likely to do so, for this organisation, as Tunstall complains, although it "seemed to be equipped with some teeth, has behaved like a frightened minnow". Workers' control, combined with co-operative marketing, is a completely realistic demand, even though it is a demand which can be realised only in a radically different political atmosphere from that of the state-subsidised managerial capitalism which is the industrial pattern of contemporary Britain.

But in the long-term strategy of workers' control the aftermath of the trawler disasters brings some important elements. Firstly the demand for shipboard representatives or shop stewards, secondly the demand for the implementation of the principle outlined by the TUC in its Economic Survey 1968 of "no subsidy without representation", and finally the tactic of "encroaching control". Following the women's campaign after the loss of the three trawlers, the men of the *Kingston Zircon* and the *Prince Charles* (risking prosecution under the archaic Merchant Shipping Act) found that they could demand *here and now* safety standards above those required by the Board of Trade regulations, without waiting for new legislation.

The trawlermen's demands, as Jack Ashwell put it in February, are "not just another pay claim, but the moment of truth for the whole industry".

The other fishermen

M. GRAHAM

DISTANT-WATER FISHING is commercially the most important section of the British fishery industry, but more than half the total catch in value is fished by near-water, middle-water and inshore vessels. The distinctions between these categories are as follows. Distant-water vessels, 140-250 ft. long, minimum crew 20, sail from Hull, Grimsby and Fleetwood to waters off Norway, Ireland, Russia and Greenland, catching mostly haddock and cod, on an average trip of three weeks, though the new freezer trawlers could be out for three months. Near-water trawlers (80-109 ft. long) and middle-water trawlers (110-139 ft. long) fish the North Sea and the Irish Sea, and the latter fish the Faroes and, increasingly, Icelandic water. The near-water fleets, in order of size, are based on Lowestoft, Aberdeen, Grimsby and Milford

Haven, and the middle-water fleets on Grimsby, Aberdeen, Fleetwood and Lowestoft. Both catch cod, haddock, whiting, hake, turbot, plaice and other flatfish, with crews of 7-9 men, average trip ten days. Inshore fishing boats are 40 to 80 ft. long. A crew of four or five often own the boat. Average trip six hours, longest one week.

Most of the small harbours around our shores have had an inshore fishing fleet at one time or another, and even today a quarter of the total weight of fish landed here comes from the inshore catches which include herrings, mackerel, sprats and such shell-fish as shrimps, crabs and lobsters.

Demersal fish—those that feed near the sea-bed, like cod and haddock, are caught by trawlers. Pelagic fish—surface feeding species like herring—are caught by drifters. The drifter fleet has declined spectacularly in this century from 1,650 vessels in 1913 to 66 in 1965. The number of registered inshore vessels fell from 8,230 in 1953 to 7,180 in 1963.

Rise and decline of the herring

Large scale herring fishing began in the Middle Ages in the Hanseatic ports of North Germany, and then with the mysterious failure of the Baltic shoals moved to Holland which was the leading European fishing nation for four hundred years. In the 19th century there grew up the fleets of herring luggers from the north-eastern Scottish ports, whose story is told in Neil Gunn's novel *The Silver Darlings*.

The great period of the steam drifter herring industry came in the years 1900 to 1914. The drifters ("loveliest ship for the job that ever was built", a fisherman remarked to Charles Parker) followed the seasonal migration of the herrings from Shetland in the summer to East Anglia in the autumn, and the girls who gutted and salted the herrings in huge quantities for export, followed the fish and the drifters. This vast industry built up the ports of Peterhead and Fraserburgh, Lowestoft and Yarmouth. The export trade declined after the First World War and the whole industry was reduced to heartbreaking poverty in the depression of the nineteen-thirties. In its modern form it is concentrated in Scottish waters. The rise and decline of the herring industry has been magnificently told in a blend of songs and interviews with fishermen in Charles Parker's "radio ballad" *Singing the Fishing* which has just become available as a gramophone record.

The ecology of the North Sea herring and its predators is a fascinating field of research, and in some ways it is an oversimplification to refer to its decline as purely a matter of over-fishing, while opinions differ about the effect of trawling for the fish-meal industry on herring stocks. Dr. W. C. Hodgson in *The Herring and Its Fishery* remarks that "We know that the herring stocks of the Southern North Sea has been capable of feeding a large part of Europe's human population for hundreds of years, but it has yet to be proved that it can, in addition, also feed Europe's livestock". On this, Sir Alister Hardy comments "But surely the livestock are for consumption in Europe,

so that the herring may still be feeding its people, if now in the form of pork or poultry which they seem to prefer. There must however be sufficient adult herring spared to keep up the stock, so perhaps those who prefer them may still be able to buy a few fresh herrings and Yarmouth bloaters as a luxury food, which by their fragrance and flavour they richly deserve to be. In Dickens's day the oyster was a poor man's food; our grandchildren may rightly come to rate the herring above the trout".

The inshore man's needs

In his pamphlet *Fish: An Antiquated Industry*, Jeremy Tunstall compares the basic economic set-up of the inshore fisherman to that of the family-run small farm. It is an arduous job, with hard conditions and very low returns. Those who still work in do so because they prefer to live in the small coastal towns and harbours where it is carried on, and prefer the relative independence of the fisherman's life to migration to industrial jobs elsewhere. The industrial worker, on holiday at the seaside, tends to agree with him, for two weeks in the year. The fact is of course that the fisherman can earn more, much more easily, by catering for holiday-makers, than by fishing. This seems to be true everywhere, in Cornwall, on the Costa Brava, or in Connemara.

The inshore fisherman is the victim, like the small farmer, of the system of marketing. He catches high quality fish which reaches shore in a very much fresher condition than most fish on the market, but he gets lower than average prices.

Tunstall remarks that "Inshore and herring fishing vessels are mainly owned by individuals, and there is no distinction between owners and crew. . . . In addition to the hazards of long hours spent at sea on small boats close to a rocky coastline, the inshore men complain of being in a weak position for marketing their fish. Road and rail communication is poor and shore based middlemen relatively strong. The distribution system is such that good catches depress prices very sharply, and there are consequently local arrangements for quota restriction of catches when conditions are good. . . . What the inshore industry needs is an assured and reasonably high price for its product. The current system—which forces men to restrict their catches artificially at a time when we are importing more than half our total fish consumption—must be wrong."

The recent expansion of territorial waters has provided greater opportunities for inshore fishermen, and fisheries research has shown that several species are more abundant in inshore waters than in the recent past—pilchards, which were once the speciality of the Cornish coasts, are an example.

Tunstall concludes that it is up to the inshore men to organise: "The inshore fishermen are at present sadly unorganised. They require funds to set up a genuine national organisation. At the same time the archaic Sea Fisheries Committees—which place too much power over local fisheries in the hands of rural County Councillors—should be

abolished. Had some real national organisation of inshore fishermen existed, it is difficult to believe they would have been so badly neglected by the White Fish Authority, which despite its show-piece at Brixham, has done very little to encourage local fishing co-operatives."

A footnote on co-operation

NEIL M. GUNN

If inshore and near-water fishing are to survive at all, it can only be through co-operation. Dr. Neil Gunn, who contributes to this issue an account of the early growth of the Scottish herring industry, sends us the comments he made at the time of the Herring Industry Committee Report at the end of the war. The subsequent history of the industry underlines his point.

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IN THIS AGE WE GET SO BEDEVILLED by slogans, labels, and schemes in the head, that we forget the realities underneath. Herring Boards or any other kind of Boards imposed from above will do no earthly good unless the producers themselves combine in some sort of union or co-operative. So combined they will then be in a position to take advantage of the Boards or of anything else that comes their way. If they are not combined, spoon-feeding by a Board will keep them going for a time, but in the end, when the spoon-feeding is withdrawn, they will collapse before those who have united whether on a private capitalist basis or otherwise.

That's the simple truth, and the economic history of the Highlands in recent times proves it. Facts about the decline in sea-fisheries, crofting, hill-sheep farming and so on are known. Equally known is the success of certain northern European countries where co-operation among the producers was the basic order and help from governmental sources the natural result.

But when one mentions co-operation, folk here shake their heads. They either think it can't be done in sea-fishing and crofting or else they get tied up in hot arguments about the SCWS and the private trader.

Never mind all that. Co-operation simply means that small independent producers, threatened by syndicates or great combines, will ultimately be done down unless they come together in a combine of their own. I am not discussing the ethics of this. I am merely stating what inevitably happens.

Now by coming together in a league or co-operative, they can

not only hold their own on the economic front, but they can also retain in large measure the ways of life and freedom which tradition and environment have made precious to them. If they don't want to be "wage slaves", they needn't be. But they have got to come together. Co-operation is a coming together in their own interests.

My friend, Peter F. Anson, has recently been in Eire studying fishing conditions round the coast. He has a wide knowledge of the sea-fisheries of Europe, and has surprised me (and possibly himself) by finding an Irish Sea Fisheries Association which arranges for the provision of boats and gear, co-operative marketing, and other enterprises. In the *Fishing News* he writes: "All fishermen members are required to enter into a Co-operative Marketing Contract under which they share in the general scheme of the Association for the sale of catches. In some districts it has been found possible to guarantee members, on a seasonal basis, fixed prices at the port of landing for their catches of white fish, plus, when conditions are good, a bonus on their earnings." The Association maintains a boat-building yard and motor repair shops, and in fact does every constructive thing it can in the general interests of the sea-fishing industry.

I knew pre-war Eire fairly well, and all I can say is that if the Irish can do that sort of thing at home, a co-operative association is no dream for Scottish fisheries. I regard self-government for Scotland as co-operation on the national level.

It was the Eire Government that set up the Irish Sea Fisheries Association. Would that Association have been in being were Irish affairs still run from London?

But I do not wish to raise any argumentative issue here. The simple point I want to make is that individual producers on sea and land will have to combine if they are going to win through. The debt on our fishermen-owned Scottish drifters before the war was as real as was the ever-increasing power of the English drifters owned and run by shore syndicates. History will repeat itself, unless we undertake to mould it nearer to our interests and desires. We can do so; but it means *doing*, action, on a basis of association or co-operation.

There is no other way that I know.

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Spanish fishermen

COLIN WARD

WHEN THE FOLK-SONG COLLECTOR Alan Lomax sat in a little coastal town listening to the polyphonic singing of the Basque fishermen, one of them leant over his table and said:

"Listen, American. We are a brotherhood, founded five hundred years ago, before Columbus and his Basque crew discovered America. We own our fishing boats in common, and whenever the weather is uncertain our captains meet together on the town bridge and decide whether it's safe for the town to fish. That way no crazy greedy individual can risk the lives of his crew and anyone who follows him. That's why we can sing together, because we're a brotherhood."

"I got the feeling," commented Lomax, "that these Basques had been singing together for a very long time."

It made me think of John Langdon-Davies's description in his book *Behind the Barricades* of the fishermen's communities along the Costa Brava on the other side of Spain. He thought that the whole character of these places had something to do with living by the sea, for he noticed the difference between the coastal villages and those a few miles back from the shore, and he compared Premia de Dalt, an inland village, "priest-controlled and medieval", with Premia d'Abaix where the fishermen were freethinkers:

"And the important thing is that in the village on the hill the morals are bad; they do horrible things to the women; but among the free-thinking people below, the relationships are much better. Often enough the fishermen do not trouble to marry, but they live with their 'comrade' far more faithfully than the legitimate husbands further inland."

The fishermen, he continued, "are the first to rise against oppression, and the most ruthless in their determination to break chains. In the fishing town in which I lived for two years there was still to be seen the burnt-out ruins of the parish church which had gone up in flames during the *Semana Trágica* of 1909. At that time San Feliu declared itself a Libertarian Republic all on its own. I not understood when I lived there, how or why this had been, but now it is perfectly clear."

He was writing a few months after the revolution in 1936, and went on to describe another fishing village at the Catalonian end of the Pyrenees, Port de la Selva, which was practically owned by its Fisherman's Co-operative, the *Posito Pescador*. There the fishermen owned the boats and the nets, the curing factory, the stores and store-houses, the refrigeration plant, the shops, the olive oil refinery, the olive groves, the transport lorries which delivered the fish at Barcelona,

the café, the hotel, the theatre and the assembly room. "By setting up a curing factory the co-operative protects itself from slumps. If the fish-market is glutted, the catch can be withdrawn and cured. By providing each of its members with an olive-grove or a vineyard or a vegetable allotment, they are insured against the disaster of continued bad weather. When they cannot fish, they labour in the vineyard. To sit in the café at Port de la Selva is to sit in an atmosphere of free men, and no one can understand Spain if he excludes from his idea of Spain, this reality."

Douglas Goldring, in a book of reminiscences of the nineteen-twenties, told a similar story of the village of Puerto de Pollensa. "The inhabitants—technically 'anarchist-communists'—ran their fishing industry on co-operative lines. The secretary of the *Posito de Pescadores*, a Venezuelan, was almost the only man in this Arcadian village who could read and write. He transacted all the business for the community and, by explaining their illiteracy, sent the tax-collector empty away. As there was no Law and Order in the village there was no crime. The honesty of these people was absolute and instinctive; no one ever tried to get the better of anyone else. . . . Everyone had enough to eat, wine was plentiful and everyone was happy. The nearest church was five miles off, in the town of Pollensa, and I never saw a priest in the village."

These fishing communities are older than Spanish anarchism and much older than the co-operative movement. The brawny Basque fisherman was not boasting when he declared to Alan Lomax that they were there before Columbus went to America. The economist Joaquín Costa describes some of these ancient communal institutions in the chapter on "Colectivismo Pesquero" in his *Colectivismo Agrario en España*, and Gerald Brenan in *The Spanish Labyrinth* refers to the very old *comunidad* of net-makers at Bagur, and says that the fisherman's commune of Port de la Selva and an exactly similar one a few miles away at Cadaqués are referred to in documents of the early sixteenth century. There was another such community at Tazones, near Villaviciosa in Asturias. The present constitution of Port de la Selva, he says, was adopted in 1929 just before the fall of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, under the influence of the productive co-operative movement founded in the 1860s by Fernando Garrido.

"Here then," comments Brenan, "we have a modern productive co-operative grafted on to an ancient communal organisation and functioning perfectly." And he concludes:

"When one considers the number of guilds or confraternities (*cofradías*) that till recently owned land and worked it in common to provide old age and sickness insurance for their members; or such popular institutions as the *Cort de la Seo* at Valencia which regulated on a purely voluntary basis a complicated system of irrigation: or else the surprising development in recent years of productive co-operative societies in which peasants and fishermen acquired the instruments of their labour, the land they needed, the necessary installations and began to produce and sell in common: one has to recognise that the Spanish

working classes show a spontaneous talent for co-operation that exceeds anything that can be found today in other European countries."

This historical background helps to explain the achievements of the industrial and agricultural collectives in Spain which sprang into life after the revolution of 1936 only to be crushed by the defenders of "democracy" as a prelude to the victory of Franco. For revolution, as Gustav Landauer put it, means the uncovering of something which has always been there, "of Community, which in fact exists alongside the State, albeit buried and laid waste".

In the summer of 1936, Laurie Lee was living at the opposite end of Spain, in an Andalusian fishing village which in his book *A Rose for Winter* he calls "Castillo". Here the fishermen were poor and unskilled, compared with the Basques and Catalans, and at the mercy of dealers and middlemen. He saw that year, "A summer of rage and optimism, of murder and lofty hopes, when the hill-peasants and the fishermen, heirs to generations of anonymous submission, had suddenly found guns in their hands and unimaginable aspirations in their breasts. I saw them shoot the fish merchants, drive the sugar planters into the hills, barricade the mountain roads, and set up the flag of their commune over the Town Hall. . . . The destructive frenzy soon wore itself out. The committee of the commune took over all the big houses that had been abandoned by their owners, and across the wall, in letters of scarlet, they chalked their naive ambitions. In this house we shall make a school for the women.' 'Here shall be founded a club for the young.' 'This house is reserved as a hospital of rest.' The committee sat night and day in the Town Hall, their guns on the table, confident that their enemies would be defeated; in the meantime drawing up an impossible spring-like way of life."

A few years after the war Mr. Langdon-Davies went back to Port de la Selva and found "a quiet sadness" about the place. It still wore the scars of Franco's Italian bombers. The Catalan language was forbidden. He had brought with him the photographs he took in 1935 of the young men cleaning the boats, salting the sardines in barrels and getting out the boats with their great acetylene lamps for the nightly fishing. "Soon several women, some old, some moderately young, but all in black and with tears in their eyes, had come to say that Pere, or Joan, or Albert or Ramon was in one of the photographs, that they had no photo or other souvenir of him, that nobody knew where his grave might be, and would I let them have a copy? . . . Hardly a family but had lost a son or a father."

And a few years after the war Mr. Lee went back to Castillo in the South. "I found it starved and humiliated, the glory gone, and the workers of the sugar fields and the sea hopeless and silent. As I walked through the town, time past hung heavy on my feet. The face of a generation had disappeared completely. A few old women recognised me, throwing up their hands with an exclamation, and came running towards me with lowered voices as though we shared a secret. But of the men I had known there was little news, and such as there was, confused. Most of them, it seemed, were either dead or fled.

The old women peered up at me with red-rimmed eyes, and each tale they told was different. . . . In the end I gave up. There was no point in making any further enquiries. Nobody lied deliberately, but nobody wished to seem certain of the truth. For the truth, in itself, was unendurable."

Nobody sang in the café of Port de la Selva, nobody sang in the bars of Castillo, where they talked at night in whispers. "But in their salty sunburnt eyes, in the twist of the copper lips, and in their silences, one saw what they could not say—a savage past, an inglorious present, a future choked with unmentionable hopes."

UNEMPLOYMENT IN HULL

UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE HULL area is the worst since 1940—over 6,500 jobless. A group of those jobless workers have organised a Hull Unemployed Workers' Committee to fight unemployment. The Committee is pressing for the rights of all the unemployed. Amongst other things, the Hull Committee has been formed to see that all men entering the Labour Exchange get their rights. The Committee has given out tens of thousands of leaflets to all the unemployed entering the Exchange on pay out days (every Thursday and Friday). These leaflets have provided a very useful service to the men signing on.

The procedure facing unemployed workers at the Exchanges is very complicated and there is no guarantee that such workers automatically receive the money they are entitled to. Practical information on all the following aspects of social security has been given out: Unemployed benefit, earnings related benefit, income tax rebate, local grants, school dinners, etc. And even more important, the Workers' Committee has taken up and won many cases of delays to claims, the wage stop has been fought successfully and the Committee has usefully represented workers on the Appeals Tribunal.

The Hull Unemployed Workers' Committee is making clear that the policy of unemployment has definite political causes. In recent leaflets the Labour Government and the employers have been severely criticised for their unacceptable actions. All unemployed workers are being urged to join the Committee, involve more workers in the struggle, make demands on local councillors, MPs, trade union officials, etc. Unemployed workers are being urged not to accept any jobs offered at the Labour Exchange at below union rates.

Unemployment is still going up. We must emphasise the importance of solidarity between workers with jobs and those without. And the campaign must be national. The Hull Unemployed Workers' Committee has much to do to consolidate its own position locally, but it is keen to hear about similar developments elsewhere with a view to joining forces, perhaps on a regional basis in the first instance. Your observations on the situation and any practical ideas for action would be most welcome.

STAN SUDDABY,

6 Hardane, Chairman, Hull Unemployed Workers' Committee.
Orchard Park, Hull.

The wonder story of the Moray Firth

NEIL M. GUNN

THERE WAS ONCE A TIME—and old folk still alive can remember the tail-end of it—when the seaboard round the Moray Firth went up in a human blaze—as hectic a blaze as ever was seen in any gold rush to the Klondyke. In the whole history of the Highlands, I know nothing like it. And the story has always fascinated me because here, for once, Highlanders were suddenly given the chance to get gold, for themselves—and how they set about it! The Klondykers certainly had nothing on them. It threw—and, I maintain, still throws—a light on all those notions about Highlanders being indifferent or lazy. Give them the proper chance . . . however, let me stick to the story of what did happen when they got the chance.

The beginnings of the story coincide with the peak of the Clearances in these northern parts. From whole straths, up Kildonan way, the people were evicted and their homes destroyed. We all know something about that tragic business, and happily I am not concerned with it here. How reluctant we are even to remember it—and how pleasant to tell a story of another kind! If I mention it, then, it is because, though great numbers of the evicted were shipped to Canada, many of them built shacks by the seashore and managed to keep alive long enough to take part in the new great adventure—the adventure with the sea.

Behind them was the land—and they knew what had happened to them there. In front of them—the sea; and the wonderful thing about the sea was that it was free to them all. They could sink or swim in it. Haddock and cod and flukes and herring were not game within the meaning of any Act. What they could catch they could eat. Only, to begin with, they were not very good at the catching. Probably many of them, from far inland glens, had never even seen the sea, for pony tracks or drove roads were the means of communication then. However, they learned, and always there had been those, living near the coast, who had ventured out in a small boat from a wild creek or narrow beach. So knowledge spread and help was given in the way help always was given to neighbours in distress in any Highland community. To transgress the ancient law of hospitality brought deep shame.

Well, that was roughly the position along great stretches of the Moray Firth in the opening years of last century, and if, in what I am going to say, I stick in particular to the northern coast—from well

south of Helmsdale right along to Wick—it is because here the difficulties were concentrated. In the first place, it had no hinterland with economic resources, no towns, no industries, no sources of capital for boats and gear; and, in the second place, from Helmsdale to Wick the coastline was—it still is—one menacing wall of cliff, with little more than stormy breaks in it, and few enough of them. To triumph, to make a Klondyke of the sea, *here*, must have seemed utterly unthinkable.

The position was even worse than that, for such historic efforts as had been made, by royal or parliamentary action, to encourage Scottish fisheries, had always, in the main, proved ineffective. Over a long period of time the Dutch had been the real sea-fishing masters, with their well-equipped fleets of boats and their accompanying large vessels or busses for curing herring at sea. The success of the Dutch is summed up in the old saying: "Amsterdam was built on herring bones".

Then someone had a thought, and the thought was a stroke of genius. More wonderful still, it was translated into an Act of Parliament, in the year 1809. And the stroke was this: that for every barrel of sound herring cured *on shore* a bounty would be paid of two shillings. Now there had long been a small bounty payment for fish *exported*. But here the bounty of two shillings was to be paid whether the barrel of herring was exported or not. No need now to emulate the Dutch way of catching and curing at sea. To the curer of one barrel of good herring *on shore*, a bounty of two shillings—or subsidy, as we would say.

That two shillings then were worth many times more than two shillings today does not give the whole picture, not for those folk whom I have mentioned, too many of them with miserable strips of land that in the best of seasons could hardly keep body and soul together. In the absence of written records, we have to use a little imagination, if we are going to get an echo of the kind of conversation that must have passed between them. And even then we would have to translate it from Gaelic, for Gaelic was the mother tongue from far south of Helmsdale to within a few miles of Wick *then*—and, indeed, for another two generations. However, they came at the English in time and I can hear them sizing up the situation in 1809 like this: "Boys, if we can get something that will float, and a herring net or two nets, and bring four or three creels of herring to the curer, we can be sure of two shillings in our hand, we can be sure of that whatever way—not to speak of what the curer will add to the two shillings, which should be another two shillings for us at the least, if there's competition among the curers at all. Four or maybe five shillings for a cran of herring—in our hand!" It was a big thought. And a thought they were free to multiply. The Highlander has never been deficient in imagination and he was a born hunter. The whole thing was right into his creel. It went to his head. And so he started.

Even the Government must have cheered, for in 1815 they lifted the two-shilling subsidy to four shillings. That did it! If the doing

was necessary—but then the Government must have begun to realise that not only were these Highlanders hauling gold from the sea, but helping to sweep the Dutch off it. It had become a national affair in wealth—and international in trade and policy.

What extraordinary scenes must have been enacted then, scenes of contrivance and ingenuity, bargaining, a promise to pay the rare one who could lend a pound or two, a promise not in writing but, more solemnly, by a spit in the palm and a handshake!

By the courtesy of the Fishery Board—I suppose I should call it the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries now—I was given permission many years ago, when I was researching into this whole matter, to inspect official records where I could find them, and I can remember calling on the Fishery officer in Helmsdale and discovering a ledger of official transactions for that very year of 1815. At the moment I cannot recollect the exact number of curers already operating in Helmsdale in 1815, but if I say a round dozen I am near enough. There were entries also regarding fishing creeks from south of Helmsdale and north to Lybster, for Helmsdale then was the official headquarters of all that stretch of coast and its business centre. In this way I got a grasp of the earlier stages of this extraordinary story.

However, as we know only too well—stroke of genius or no stroke of genius—what the Government gives with one hand it has the other and stronger hand ever ready to take back. So in the 1820s the Government decreed that the subsidy would be withdrawn, not in one fell swoop, but shilling by shilling, until by 1830 the lot would be gone. You can imagine the outcry. Ruination! What happened was that the industry took the loss in its stride and swept on to greater triumphs. By the 1840s there were up to 250 boats fishing out of Helmsdale in the summer season. But the total of all the crews of the boats is only one item, for behind them were curers, coopers, women gutters and packers, makers of herring nets and creels, shop-keepers, carriers, seamen engaged in the export trade—a whole complex living swarm of human life. Then, remember that Helmsdale only started herring fishing less than 30 years before, in those years when the terrible Clearances were at their height.

I look at the map in my mind, with *some* of the fishing place-names south and north of Helmsdale: Embo, Golspie, Brora, Portgower, Helmsdale, Berriedale, Dunbeath, Latheronwheel, Forse, Swiney, Lybster. After that, Clyth and the high cliffs, with the remarkable Whaligoe, on the way to the great fishing port of Wick. Of course, Wick had long had commerce with the sea, but as late as 1767 its fishermen still regarded herring as bait for white fish. But by 1840 Wick had 428 native boats and 337 strange boats at the herring fishing. But again, by official record, *total* personnel engaged at the peak of the summer fishing was no less than 7,882. May I say, in passing, that anyone interested in such statistics, and in the kinds of boats and gear used, will find it all in that fascinating and authoritative book by Peter F. Anson, called *Fishing Boats and Fisher Folk on the East Coast of Scotland*.

Meanwhile, let me glance at a more directly human aspect of the story and in a somewhat different light. In that same year, 1840, was published a Statistical Account of Scotland, written mostly by ministers of the Gospel about their various parishes. Here is the Reverent Charles Thomson counting the number of—no, not boats, but public houses in Wick and reaching a grand total of 45. Says he: “The herring fishing has increased wealth, but also wickedness. No care is taken of the 10,000 young strangers of both sexes, crowded together with the inhabitants during the six weeks of the fishery and exposed to drink and every other temptation.” So he called the pubs, “Seminaries of Satan and Belial”. Apparently on occasion up to 500 gallons of whisky were disposed of in a day in Wick. A fair dram, I admit! And how interesting it would be to find out just how and where and with what results that dram got drunk! But I have only time to balance this by another picture of life, from which Satan and Belial were certainly absent, and which continued to within living memory: that of the crews of hundreds upon hundreds of boats at sea on a quiet evening, after their nets had been shot, taking up, one after another, one of the Psalms of David, until it seemed the sea itself sang and the cliffs and the cottages were held in wonder.

A tireless, tough, and God-fearing people, taking their lives in their hands, on these treacherous coasts, in their small open boats—and sending their tens of thousands of barrels of herring deep into Germany, into the Baltic Sea, and far into Russia.

I cannot pursue the story here and tell how boats got bigger, got decked, until finally the steam drifter took over and concentrated the herring fishing in a few large ports. Many of the smaller creeks, which once knew such a surge of warm life, are now quite derelict. But the men and women of that time—for nearly a whole century—did something more remarkable, with more wonder of achievement in it, than any story of mine could ever adequately tell.

“The other day two workers were discussing their frustration, their fears of redundancy with me. . . . Neither of the workers is a union militant, but they said, quite naturally, that if the IPC couldn’t run our factory, they should hand it over to us and we would operate it, because we don’t need management there. Production would go on just the same. Of course, I pointed out to them that as long as the profit motive exists and IPC have a monopoly, they would rather close half their factories than hand them over . . .”

—ROBERT DOYLE: “The Print Jungle” in *Work*.

“. . . I so earnestly believe that the management of the railway must be left to the railwayman . . .”

—HOPE WISE: “The Signalwoman” in *Work*.

On the Job

NICK WILDE

WORK; Twenty personal accounts, edited by Ronald Fraser. A Pelican Original. Penguin Books. 6s.

AFTER FINISHING THIS BOOK I felt almost relieved. All these people were dissatisfied with their work. So am I. Most of them did not enjoy their work. Their workmates were unsympathetic. The whole thing seemed pretty frustrating. It's not quite as simple as this, though. Although we may all feel we hate work, we would probably rather work than not, at least I would. The poor chap on the dole in this book isn't happy and few of us are happy in this lack of occupation, or income.

Most of the writers had left their jobs. They realised they were at a dead end or found that they could not change the job. Some suffered the severe handicap of being literate in employment demanding near illiteracy while others would have liked to have changed the system but could do nothing, for example the doctor who would wish a change in hospital organisation but could not hope to achieve this due to lack of Health Service funds.

Raymond Williams sums up the various statements in his essay "The meaning of work" which closes the book. His main points and a few of my own follow.

We are imprisoned by convention. Staff/worker divisions, category divisions, and ultimately class divisions result. The evaluation of each individual's work and its division into "worthwhile" and others is inherent within us although we all make some contribution to the whole.

"Without some sort of personal involvement, real or imaginary, work would be intolerable" (p. 9).

So says Ronald Fraser in his introduction. The factory worker says

"Work to me is in a void, and I begrudge every precious minute of my time that it takes" (p. 11).

"We are rarely offered (perhaps 'allowed' would be a better word) anything that would be productive of serious thought" (p. 17).

This is the tobacco factory worker. I worked in what was probably this factory during a school vacation and was told "You're paid to work, not think". One bloke said to me "I'd rather come here than go to work".

Many writers found that they had not enough work to keep them occupied. The technical lecturer had some weeks of idleness. In the printing industry men stand around and are paid for the work the machines are now doing.

"The modern worker neither gives anything to work nor expects anything (apart from his wages) from it" (p. 12).

In a sense, there is this difference. The manual or factory worker sees the aim of each new advance as the elimination of himself. He, of course, fights and resists it. Under a system of workers control the worker would be working towards the elimination of his own drudgery for his own benefit (or profit!) and not for the management or boss.

For the man who works with his brain, progress enhances his task. The constantly changing situation for the doctor, solicitor or scientist may not enable him to progress towards a clearly defined goal but new developments will add to his interest and store of knowledge.

Analogies with prison and slavery are made by many of the writers. Working from 7 a.m. till 5 p.m. five days a week for 40 years with two weeks' holiday in each year seems akin to slavery—it is in fact a moral and economic slavery.

"The meaning of work, in such a system, is reduced, against all other human interests, to a profitable return on the investment of capital" (p. 294).

The authoritarian structure of industry, social services (including hospitals) and education do not involve those who work in them. At any level, in work, local government, central government, it appears that for an active part in guiding our lives we should vote and sit back. The election of representatives to become the state and the state ownership of our means of livelihood involves us all with the state. We employ ourselves yet have no control over how we do it. The so-called public ownership of the nationalised industry is a lie in that they are monopolies in a capitalist economy. They can get very useful handouts when mismanaged but that is the sole difference from the "private sector".

Williams says

"Nothing is now more important in British society than the detailed thinking and practice of workers control: the key idea of the self-managing enterprise which is now the most living part of the socialist movement, and which has already passed from the simple ideas appropriate to small scale institutions, to complex and far reaching ideas which explore the practices of control in large scale and technically complicated industries" (pp. 296-7).

The case histories set the scene. Reading others talking shop, reflecting on one's own condition helps us to a realisation of what is wrong. These essays first appeared in the *New Left Review* and this accounts for the enlightened attitude but we have to look at our own place of work and see how to change it. It's got to work for the bus driver, his conductor and his passengers, the doctor and his patients. It may appear more difficult in the so-called professions but a change in the structure of society is shown to be needed. A change in "work" which is unavoidable for the majority of people and takes up most of our lifetime. We ought on retirement to be able to feel not as Bert says on page 17, "Anything's better than that bloody hole", but that we have enjoyed it, been involved with it and in it and still feel part of it.

How long will fisheries last ?

ALREADY IN MANY COUNTRIES people live in semi-starvation and they have a constant struggle to maintain even that inadequate standard. In fact, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations reports that food output per head has been falling consistently for the past five years. We know that the answer is more and still more food production to win freedom from hunger for mankind. . . . Farming must be more intensive. But is that enough on its own? Will it be enough even if we spend one-tenth of the money on fertilizers for backward countries that we do on trying to get to the moon? When we talk of food, we tend to think almost entirely in terms of agriculture, in spite of the fact that throughout human history land-farming has proved inadequate. . . . Now the fisherman will have to come to the rescue in an even bigger way to supplement the world's inadequate food supplies. But can he?

On land, deserts have been caused by forests being wantonly destroyed. Dust bowls have been created by greedy farming and whole peoples have been forced to migrate as a result. Even excessive browsing of goats has ruined once fertile tracts of land. On the other hand, the sea is huge; it occupies 140 million square miles, seventy per cent of the earth's surface. At its deepest, it is more than a mile deeper than Mount Everest stands high. Its average depth is more than five times the average height of the land. Being so vast, its resources would seem to be inexhaustible; and perhaps they would be, if it were not for man's greed and his failure to unite for the process of living.

Already we have many examples of the "desert" that can be made even in the sea. In the northern hemisphere man has already exterminated the whale to all intents and purposes. Now he is bidding fair to commit the same crime in the southern hemisphere: the world population of the blue whale, for example, is now well under 2,000.

In the North Sea, the once prolific haddock has been over-fished to a calamitous extent. Fifty years ago, a trawler's average landings of haddock for each day's absence from port came to nearly eight hundredweight. Now this figure has fallen to well under two hundredweight, in spite of the improvements in trawlers and trawling techniques. Similarly, fifty years ago the North Sea in general provided sixty per cent of all fish landed in British ports; nowadays the figure is around eleven per cent.

All the time there are examples of how men are snatching the riches of the ocean in a concerted smash-and-grab raid, with not much more thought for the future than actual bandits exert.

—ALAN JENKINS: *The Silver Haul*, 1967.

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